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Final semester evaluation of the ArT 3. semester 2009

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## **1. The theme, content and objectives of the semester**

The semester module *Transition & (E)Motion* dealt with performative aspects in artwork, placing elements of technology as conditions for reactive and interactive artworks, bringing with it events, kinetic / music / theatre / dance performances, and other time-based artistic materials and composition techniques. The foci included both conceptual and technological aspects, with 'intelligent tools' and 'interactive spaces' envisioned where the physical world interacts with the audience / performers. The semester was formally divided into 3 modules. The module 'Art Installation Design I' (module 1) focused on the planning and development of art installations through the course 'Project Planning and Art Installation Design', while the theoretical course 'Art Theory & History II' functioned as module 2 ('Art History & Science 2'). The semester project 'Transition & (E)Motion' (module 3) resulted in the final learning outcome for the students' skills in conceptual and artistic developments for their semester projects.

## **2. Pedagogical principle and progression for the structuring of the semester**

The overall idea was to get the students to engage with as much practical experience and theoretical understanding as possible through an artistic-practical module (Art Installation Design I, in which students showed their results early in the semester during Kulturnatten) and a conceptual development module (Art Theory & History II), before (and while) engaging in the final semester project work of the third module. This required students to put in the necessary effort for immersion into both theoretical/conceptual issues and artistic/practical issues. This approach seems to have worked out quite well, as the resulting projects were very ambitious and well received by the public and academic evaluators alike. However, the students did in some cases feel that this was quite a lot to expect in one semester, explaining that they would have liked more time for concentration in each area and for their final semester projects. Nonetheless, it is clear that this pedagogical progression laid the foundation necessary for both solid concept development, and reflective understanding of the practical works in the final projects at the culmination of the semester.

### **3. Courses and workshops**

The semester consisted of courses and workshops that dealt with different perspectives on Transition & (E)Motion, and the performative aspects of interaction. These courses and workshops were considered building blocks for the final semester project, which finalized with the opening of an interactive new media exhibition / performance. The planning, construction and composition of these events makes up the final semester project.

#### **3.1 Project Planning and Art Installation Design I**

The course consisted primarily of workshop activities, led by 3 supervisors. There were many “real” problems to solve in this course, as less than one month into the semester the artworks had to be shown during the Kulturnatten event in Aalborg. Students commented that these workshops were positive experiences, and that the coordinators were working well with them. The outcome for each group was the conceptual and practical development of a “musical” kinetic sculpture of their own design. Overall, the students spent more time on the project than they felt was given to this course (5 ECTS), but ended up with worthwhile experiences in developing concepts and planning a joint artistic exhibition.

#### **3.2 Art Theory & History II**

A course that introduced the students to concepts, terms and methods that provide contextual knowledge for dealing artistic and technological challenges and potentials in a historical and theoretical perspective. The 2 teachers aimed the course at historical and theoretical understanding of the aesthetics of Space / Compositions / Components, as a framework for understanding artistic experiences in a historical and contemporary perspective. The theory and knowledge gained in this course was part of the conceptual and practical launch pad for the development of the final semester project. The goal was to enable the students to apply this knowledge in various forms of expression. The students felt the course was somewhat hard to follow, in part due to many re-scheduled lectures and would have appreciated better information about what to expect for the examination.

#### **3.3 Sensors and Actuators I**

This course came in the form of 4 “hands-on” lectures focused on basic electronics, sensor technology, and kinetic actuators. The students felt it was very relevant to their projects, both in Art Installation Design I, and for their final semester project. The theory began with a review of basic “Gymnasium Physics” and worked up through the electronic knowledge needed to gain a common understanding and

vocabulary used in the field. The students each had to produce 2 small works as assignments that were to be included in their individual portfolios turned in at the end of the semester. Some students felt that more time on could be spent on prototyping electronics, but this was ended up happening outside of the allotted course time anyway due to the requirements for the other modules in the semester.

### **3.4 Programming**

This course focused on interactive systems and introduced different programming languages as mediums for time-based composition and interaction. It was noted that this course worked very well together with the Sensors and Actuators course, but some students felt that it was a bit too fast, presenting too many concepts and content in too little time. The majority of the course focused on visual programming languages, allowing students to engage quickly and understand concepts without having to become a master of some complex programming “toolchain” before achieving interesting results. The students enjoyed that class examples included programs that produced sound, visuals, and kinetic movement in interactive experiences.

### **3.5 Design and Artistic Methodology III**

This course came in the form of a workshop where the teacher presented and discussed basic principles within performance and staging of bodies, roles and actions. The objective was to enable the students to apply and discuss these principles in their final semester project. The students were required to engage by using their own bodies in the process, experiencing the concepts presented “first hand”. The course worked well with the methodologies for concept development of the semester project.

### **3.6 Drawing and Sketching Technique III**

This course went well, with students using the sketching and drawing tools which were presented for kinetic structural system designs. It introduced the students to basic topologies of mechanisms and movements, through theoretical as well as analogue practice the students explored how mechanisms can create linear motion, rotary motion, intermittent motion, oscillation, reciprocating motion and irregular motion. Students commented that it was a useful course, but that in some cases the practical sessions were cut short, and as such the exercises were not finished.

### 3.7 Digital Representation I

This course worked well with students learning the fundamentals of digital photography tools (such as Adobe Lightroom) which were presented by Sune Petersen. It introduced the students to various working methods, and brought critiques on aesthetics and design into the process. The students enjoyed this course, and used much of the learning towards making documentation of their projects for the final semester individual portfolios.

### 3.8 Summary

These courses formed much of the learning for the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of ArT, along with a workshop as part of the semester module 'Transition & (E)Motion', which served as a launch pad for the final project. This workshop was taught by 2 guest artists, and was focused primarily on interactive performance. The experiences students gained from working with these established artists were used to inform and/or transform their conceptual and practical elements of their own works as developed for the final semester project. In the workshop (and in the student's subsequent work), sensor and actuator technologies were applied, rendering time-based works as a mixture of pre-defined and interactive processes.

### 4. Supervision

Supervision responsibilities were taken care of by 3 supervisors from Inst. 7 and 11. As each of the supervisors has competences in different areas, we decided to help each other when needed – this worked quite well, yet kept a clear leadership role apparent to each group. The external examiner, Morten Breinbjerg, brought a good perspective and approach to the censoring process, due to his academic background. There were no problems with the supervision or censor activities this semester, and the students felt they had good communication with everyone.

### 5. Summary

The overall progression and pedagogical strategy seemed to have worked well, albeit quite a lot of material was covered during the semester. The students created interesting interactive artefacts and performances; they were committed and hard working, in no small part due to the busy semester schedule. In retrospect, picking the one most important thing that could be improved in future years, it would likely be pruning the schedule a bit to give the students more time to concentrate on each course. Nonetheless, the students in general stated that they enjoyed the semester's work.